



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session Mary Birmingham

KINGDOM OF GOD



Rembrandt 1606-1669, *The Hidden Treasure*. Public domain.

Matthew: 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer (from the liturgy of Christ the King)

Leader:

Let us pray.

(pause)

Stir up the will of your faithful, we pray, O Lord,
that, striving more eagerly
to bring your divine work to fruitful completion,
they may receive in greater measure
the healing remedies your kindness bestows.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

From Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, Roman Missal.



Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
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Bishop of Orlando

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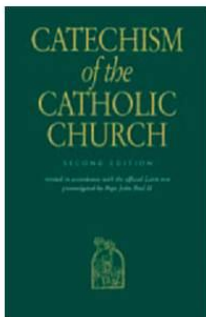


Sharing Human Experience

Catechist leads participants in a five-minute small group sharing exercise. Break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.

- ▶ What does the word kingdom mean to you?
- ▶ Describe what you would consider to be a perfect world.
- ▶ What would it take for that perfect world to exist?

Catechist uses their responses to launch into a discussion about the kingdom of God.



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 543-570.

Catechist begins this topic with these points:

- ▶ Jesus taught a very challenging gospel. Many simply could not accept his teaching and fell away. Jesus reminded his disciples that they would need to rely on the gift of faith and grace given to them by God in order to believe in the kingdom he came to establish. It was a kingdom unlike any kingdom they expected.
- ▶ The people expected a Messiah who would restore the former glory of Israel as a nation. They expected a warrior messiah. God was doing something altogether different. Jesus came to establish the reign of God not by might, but by love and by the shedding of his own blood.
- ▶ Jesus gave us the blueprint for the perfect world he envisioned. In that perfect world, he would reign as king. In that world, the lion would lay side by side with the lamb. In that perfect world, nations would be at peace, and all God's children would live in harmony. In that perfect world, the harmony of the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Paradise, would be restored.
- ▶ In that perfect world, we would love the Lord our God with heart, mind, soul and we would love our neighbors as ourselves.
- ▶ In that perfect world, we would show our love for God and one another by the way we take care of the earth and all who are poor, downtrodden, oppressed—widows and orphans.

- ▶ In a perfect world, all of the people of the earth would live according to the covenant that God forged with people at the beginning of time.
- ▶ Such is the perfect kingdom of God envisioned by Christ, the kingdom that he would definitively come to restore at the end of time, the Last Days.
- ▶ However, until that time we live in the tension of now and not yet.
- ▶ One of Jesus' foundational teachings is that the Kingdom of God is now.
- ▶ The Kingdom of God is present in Jesus himself as he teaches us how to live according to the gospel he preached.
- ▶ The kingdom is present and we are members of it when we recognize that Jesus saved us from sin and gave us a share in his divine life. Scriptures tell us that he made us a little less than the angels. Through Jesus' taking human form, through his Incarnation, he made the entire world holy.
- ▶ When we live the good news of Jesus, we are living in the kingdom.
- ▶ Kingdom living results in living a life of love, justice, and mercy, not just for oneself but for the entire world.
- ▶ We experience the kingdom on two levels. We experience the reign of God now, in this world. And we look forward to the permanent kingdom yet to come in heaven.
- ▶ Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is now, a present reality, just as it is a future reality.
- ▶ There is evidence in Scripture to make such an assertion. Jesus said that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:14-15).
- ▶ In obedience to his Father's will, Jesus initiates the kingdom of heaven in our midst, here and now, on earth.
- ▶ The Church teaches us that there are three ways that we enter the Kingdom of God:
 - through faith in Jesus,
 - through baptism into the Church and
 - through participation in the life of all the members of the Church, participation in the life of the community (USCCA, 79-80)
 - We call this gathering of God's people, the Church, the family of God.
 - Jesus is the head of that family through his word, through signs that



Peter is given the keys
to the Kingdom of God
Meister des Perikopenbuches Heinrichs II.
Early 11th c.

reveal God's reign and by sending disciples to spread the good news.

- "The Word of the Lord is compared to a seed which is sown in a field; those who hear the Word with faith and become part of the little flock of Christ have received the Kingdom itself" (Lumen Gentium, #5).
- ▶ Jesus established his kingdom on earth. We are invited to be part of that kingdom by living Christ's paschal mystery.
- ▶ What do we mean by that?
 - We live the paschal mystery and help establish God's kingdom when we commit to join our lives to Jesus' cross and his resurrection.
 - We promote the kingdom when we accept our daily crosses and our daily risings and offer them in love for the sake of others.
 - We promote the kingdom of God whenever we pray for others, whenever we share our stories of the cross, our human failings, our human successes, and our stories of God's action in our lives in order to offer hope to others.
 - We promote the kingdom of God when we live the Beatitudes Jesus taught us, when we live by their moral imperative. (See Appendix #1 for listing.)
- ▶ Everyone is called to God's kingdom.
- ▶ The Kingdom of God especially belongs to the poor and the lowly. Jesus identifies with the poor and those humble enough to hear his word. Conditions for membership in God's kingdom are that we respond in love to the poor and less fortunate.
- ▶ Sinners are welcome and are part of God's kingdom. They are invited to deep conversion and transformation.

Catechist leads a group exercise to illustrate these points. Give these or similar instructions to the group:

Part one: Choose one good Christian that you know. It could be a member of our particular group or another person. Make a list of every way you have observed this person fully living and helping to establish the kingdom of God in our midst based on the criteria we just mentioned. In other words, in what ways have you observed this person doing the following:

- ✓ Daily accepting the cross in his or her life?
- ✓ Offering his or her struggles for others?
- ✓ Praying for others?
- ✓ Sharing his or her stories of faith with others?
- ✓ Responding to the needs of the poor and suffering members of the human family?
- ✓ Entering into deep relationship with Jesus Christ?

Engage in the exercise, share results with the larger group. After this exercise is completed, engage in part two. Catechist: do not hand out the sheet for part two until they have completed and discussed part one.

Part two: Make a list of every way you have and are fully living and helping to establish the kingdom of God in our midst based on the criteria we just mentioned. In other words, in what way have you

- ✓ Daily accepted the cross in your life
- ✓ Offered your struggles for others
- ✓ Prayed for others
- ✓ Shared your stories of faith with others

- ✓ Responded to the needs of the poor and suffering members of the human family
- ✓ Entered into deep relationship with Jesus Christ

Catechist invites participants to make their list and be prepared to share their responses with the wider group.

Catechist continues:

Kingdom of God and Jesus' preaching, teaching, and parables

- ▶ Jesus' preaching and teaching revealed a passionate, urgent effort to communicate that the Kingdom of God was near at hand.
- ▶ Yet, Jesus' teaching communicated two almost polar opposites about the kingdom of God. Jesus insisted: 1. The coming of the kingdom is a future, gradual, slow, and faintly visible reality, and 2. the coming of the kingdom is here, now, in this place and in the person of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ The reference to the gradual, future emergence of the kingdom over time that is preceded by slow growth and pruning must be considered alongside Jesus' insistence that the kingdom of God is an urgent, immediate reality.
- ▶ For example, Jesus illustrated slow, imperceptible growth of the kingdom by the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows ever so slowly and barely visibly into a huge bush. He illustrated the gradual nature of the kingdom by the parable of the leaven. Gradually the yeast transformed the entire batch.
- ▶ Contrast those gradual images with the passage from Luke in which the Pharisees directly asked Jesus when they could expect the kingdom to arrive. Jesus told them "You cannot tell by careful watching when the reign of God will come. Neither is it a matter of reporting it is 'here' or 'there.' The reign of God is already in your midst" (Lk. 17:20-21).
- ▶ Jesus is content to let us ponder both realities. As stated earlier the kingdom of God is now and not yet.
- ▶ The breadth of the kingdom in which God reigns supreme over all the nations of the earth will indeed take place in the future.
- ▶ That does not mean, however, that we are suspended in the world's womb waiting to be born. No, we are called to respond to the imperatives of the kingdom now or else be destined to live a self-centered, self-righteous existence.

Parables

- ▶ We learn a great deal about God's kingdom through Jesus' parables.
- ▶ They challenge us to give all that we are to build God's kingdom by our words and our actions.
- ▶ "The parables highlight the social character of the kingdom. Jesus never presents the kingdom as a private affair between God and an individual. Rather, it is an active force in the world, a reconciling presence creating a sense of solidarity among people."¹

¹ Marthaler, Berard, *The Creed*, Mystic: Twenty Third Publications, 1987, 223-227.

- ▶ Jesus' parables teach us about what it means to live and promote God's kingdom.
- ▶ His parables reveal an inconceivable sense of urgency. The parable of the hidden treasure reminds us that once the person finds the treasure, he or she rushes to sell everything in order to buy the land where the treasure was found. Jesus does not say, "And after a few months, the person who finds the treasure puts all his belongings up for sale and then waits for the best price so he or she can purchase the land." No. One can sense the incredible haste to complete the transaction and purchase the land to secure the treasure.
- ▶ Jesus' sense of urgency brings with it a call—the call to repentance and reconciliation.
- ▶ Jesus insisted upon a complete reordering of one's life, a *metanoia*, a change of direction: conversion, conversion, conversion!
- ▶ Members of the kingdom are called to discern the priorities in their lives. They are to ask themselves: "To what and for whom am I willing to expend my time, my energy, my love, and my passion?" If the answer to that question is not Christ and the kingdom of God, then serious conversion and repentance is needed.

Catechist invites participants to break into dyads. Each group of two creates two parables or metaphors that would describe the kingdom of God the way Jesus described it. After completing the exercise, each dyad shares their parable or metaphor with the entire group.

1. The first parable or metaphor describes the gradual, imperceptible nature of the kingdom, the kingdom of God that is slowly in process and will come to fulfillment in the future. The kingdom of God is like...
2. The second parable or metaphor describes the immediate, urgent now nature of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is like...

See Appendix #2 for an example.

Kingdom of God and miracles

- ▶ Miracles were signs that God's kingdom had arrived. We know the kingdom is at hand through the signs Jesus performed. Miracles strengthen faith.
- ▶ "The Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth" (LG #5).
- ▶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: the signs Jesus performed bear witness to him and invited faith (#548).
- ▶ "By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, illness, and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in the vocation as God's children and causes them all forms of human bondage" (CCC #549).
- ▶ Establishment of the kingdom is intimately connected to Jesus' healing, liberating mission to free the world from sin.
- ▶ *Miracle* is a term we use for the visible signs of God's presence, power, and love for his people that was observed in both the Old and New Testament (and still today).
- ▶ We know the kingdom is at hand through the signs Jesus performed. Miracles

strengthen faith. “The Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth” (Lumen Gentium #5).

- ▶ We are not, however, to view them in a magical, manipulative way. A miracle is an astonishing event that appears to have gone beyond or suspended the usual natural order. Nature cannot suspend itself. Thus, for nature to be suspended, God must intervene.
- ▶ Miracles are happenings that are accomplished by divine agency outside the commonly observed order of things (Thomas Aquinas).
- ▶ Miracles are more than an extraordinary event, however. They provide depth of meaning; they are signs that invite the personal response of conversion and faith.
- ▶ Not everyone who watched Jesus perform miracles had the eyes to “see” what they meant. Those who constantly asked for proof of who he was by some extraordinary sign or miracle were consistently refused.
- ▶ Another biblical understanding of miracle is: “marvelous, wonderful, and awesome deeds that are seen as signs of God’s mercy and that reveals his infinite power and majesty...an act of power through which God gives a sign to human beings who are always astonished by it even though they recognize it quite in keeping with God’s nature” (John Pilch, 620, 630: NJBC).
- ▶ Thus, it is important to remember that living in the kingdom invites us to not only reflect on the miracles of Jesus, but also on the miracles that occur in our own lives if we would have the eyes to see them.

Catechist shares an experience of miracle from his or her own life. See appendix #3. Catechist then poses this question to the group:

- ▶ The gift of life is a miracle. Living in the kingdom of God invites us to see the everyday miracles we take for granted. What are some of those everyday miracles?

Catechist engages in an open dialogue. Hopefully, participants will elicit such things as the gift of life itself, the miracle of creation, the miracle of birth, the miracle of death, the miracle of loving relationships.

Catechist now poses this question:

- ▶ Have you ever had an experience in your life that you would consider miraculous, in which you or someone you know were awed by the action of God in your life?

Catechist invites participants to share with one other. Catechist then elicits some responses in wider group. Make connections with what they shared and what you presented.

The kingdom of God and the Church

- ▶ Jesus empowers the apostles to carry on his work establishing the kingdom. That authority continues through the pope, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and through the work of God’s people—through the Church.
- ▶ Everyone is part of the Kingdom of God—from the pope down to every member. As has been stated, we live in God’s kingdom now with hope in the kingdom yet to come.
- ▶ Through the story of the Transfiguration in which Jesus was transfigured in glorious light in front of his disciples, we are given a glimpse of the God’s heavenly kingdom.
- ▶ We will one-day share in Jesus’ transfigured glory when we join him in the eternal

city. We must not lose sight of that hope. Yet we live in the present. Our reality is that the kingdom of God is *now*.

- ▶ Jesus envisions a kingdom of peace where the lame walk, the blind see; where people lay down their lives for one another and the poor and oppressed are cared for.
- ▶ When one looks at today's society, it is often difficult to imagine such a kingdom. However, the kingdom of God is at hand when Christians gather in truth, hope, and love; when they live a gospel life, repent, change their lives, and spread the good news.²
- ▶ We help to establish the kingdom of God when we live according to God's holy Word.
- ▶ We are given access to the gospel when we are faithful to frequent reading of the biblical texts, when we hear those texts proclaimed in the Church's liturgy and when we tell others how the WORD of God has changed our lives and how it has challenged us to be better disciples.
- ▶ The kingdom of God is proclaimed at every liturgy when the gospel is proclaimed, and the Eucharist and the sacraments are celebrated. Every liturgy is a proclamation of the reign of God. Every liturgy gives us a taste of the kingdom to come.
- ▶ Every liturgy strengthens us to go out and establish the Kingdom of God in the world where God has put us. We promote the reign of God when we go out and tell others about it and when we try to live it as best we can.³

² *Constitution on the Church*, Lumen Gentium, #5. United States Catholic Conference, Washington D.C., Nov. 21, 1964.
Marthaler, Berard. *The Creed*, Twenty Third Publications, Mystic CT, 1987. (223-227).

³ The following biblical citations are but a few that addresses the reign of God. Mt. 5:3, 11:25, 16: 21-23, 8; 11 10:5-7, 28: 25: 31-46. Lk. 4: 18, 7:22, 15:7, 7: 11-32. Heb. 4: 15; Mk. 1: 14-15; Jn. 12:32, 4:33-34. Acts 2:22, Lk 7:18-23.



Community Connections

One way we live in and promote the kingdom of God is by reaching out to those who are suffering, those who are sick and in pain.

Catechist may invite a parishioner to come and share about a particular ministry he or she is involved in that promotes the kingdom of God such as ministry to the sick. Encourage the group to consider the various ministries in the parish and be opened to participate in one of them. Perhaps secure an opportunity for individuals to accompany a minister to the sick as they minister to the ill members of the community either in their homes or in the hospital.



Mystagogy & your decision for change

What did you learn about the Kingdom of God in this session?

1. What did you learn today about the Kingdom of God?
2. What did Jesus use to describe the Kingdom of God?
3. What two opposite definitions that are both true did Jesus teach us about the Kingdom of God?
4. What signs illustrated that the Kingdom of God had arrived?
5. How does one become a member of the Kingdom of God?
6. What event in Jesus' life illustrated the Kingdom of God we will one day experience in heaven?
7. What are conditions of membership in God's kingdom?
8. What is the challenge of the kingdom?

Discuss the challenges and implications of this teaching

1. What evidence is there in our communities, Church, and world that the Kingdom of God is in our midst as Jesus promised it is?

2. Establishing the Kingdom of God means we are attentive to the needs of those who suffer, the poor and those who have no advocates to speak for them. The United States recently passed health legislation and is in heated dialogue over immigration reform. One way to promote the reign of God is to openly be advocates for the dignity and rights of all people. Call your representatives and speak out for the dignity of all persons. Refer to the USCCB website about the bishops' position on various legislations that would protect the life and dignity of all of the members of God's kingdom.

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two.

- ▶ If Jesus were to come a year from now, what would you like to accomplish in your life in that year?
- ▶ Are there any behaviors or attitudes you would like to change?
- ▶ How do today's liturgy and our sharing on the Kingdom of God challenge you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ What might be a response?
- ▶ How would you answer the priority question? To what and for whom are you willing to expend your time, your energy, your love, and your passion? If the answer to that question is not Christ and the kingdom of God, then what are the obstacles in your life that get in the way of that primary priority? What can you do to overcome that obstacle?



Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2. If this is NOT a catechumenal setting, catechist reads the prayer of Pope Clement that reflects the implications of living in the kingdom of God.

Catechist: Listen carefully as I pray the prayer of Pope Clement XI that reminds us of the implications of Jesus’ invitation to establish the kingdom of God in our lives.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

*Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.
I love you: let me love you more and more.
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.
I worship you as my first beginning.
I long for you as my last end.
I praise you as my constant helper.
And I call you as my loving protector.
I want to do what you ask of me:
In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.
Let me love you Lord as my God.
And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.
A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.*

Intercessions

Catechist: Let us together pray the prayer that Jesus taught us that explicitly calls for the coming of the kingdom.

Appendix

#1. Beatitudes

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.
- Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
- Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
- Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:3-10)

#2. A parable or metaphor to describe the gradual nature of the kingdom or the immediate nature of the kingdom or a description of the kingdom.

GRADUAL: "The kingdom of God is like a caterpillar that slowly turns into a cocoon and waits to emerge as a beautiful butterfly."

DESCRIPTION: "The kingdom of God is like an ant hill in which all the ants work together to create a perfectly ordered, harmonious, communal life and home under the guidance and leadership of the queen."

#3. St. Maria Goretti: a miracle

My family truly believes that through eyes of faith we experienced a miracle, a miracle of God's timing and a miracle that invited us to trust that God was with us and in charge of our lives. Because of a special devotion to St. Maria Goretti who was martyred in a violent death, we prayed for her intercession throughout our son-in-law's stay in Afghanistan. We sent him there with a relic that was a reminder to pray for her intercession. He was there for over 15 months. We had no idea when he was coming home. These were extremely stressful days for our family on many levels. It was difficult to see that God was guiding our lives. We desperately needed God's consoling presence. Our daughter called and excitedly told us that her husband had called. For security reasons, he could not give the date but he told her to count back nine days from her brother's birthday. Referring to her Catholic calendar, she counted back nine days; it was the feast of St. Maria Goretti. Now some would say that is pure coincidence. We believe that it was God's miracle of timing. But more importantly, it was God trying to let us know that he was with us in the struggles of our lives. The miracle itself was less important than what it meant to us. As members of the kingdom, we were given a lifeline.

Handout on the Kingdom of God

- ▶ Jesus taught a very challenging gospel. Many simply could not accept his teaching and fell away. Jesus reminded his disciples that they would need to rely on the gift of faith and grace given to them by God in order to believe in the kingdom he came to establish. It was a kingdom unlike any kingdom they expected.
- ▶ The people expected a Messiah who would restore the former glory of Israel as a nation. They expected a warrior messiah. God was doing something altogether different. Jesus came to establish the reign of God not by might, but by love and by the shedding of his own blood.
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- ▶ In that perfect world, we would love the Lord our God with heart, mind, soul and we would love our neighbors as ourselves.
- ▶ In that perfect world, we would show our love for God and one another by the way we take care of the earth and all who are poor, downtrodden, oppressed—widows and orphans.
- ▶ In a perfect world, all of the people of the earth would live according to the covenant that God forged with people at the beginning of time.
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- ▶ The Church teaches us that there are three ways that we enter the Kingdom of God:
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insistence that the kingdom of God is an urgent, immediate reality.

- ▶ For example, Jesus illustrated slow, imperceptible growth of the kingdom by the parable of the tiny mustard seed that grows ever so slowly and barely visibly into a huge bush. He illustrated the gradual nature of the kingdom by the parable of the leaven. Gradually the yeast transformed the entire batch.
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Parables

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- ▶ “The parables highlight the social character of the kingdom. Jesus never presents the kingdom as a private affair between God and an individual. Rather, it is an active force in the world, a reconciling presence creating a sense of solidarity among people.”⁴
- ▶ Jesus’ parables teach us about what it means to live and promote God’s kingdom.
- ▶ His parables reveal an inconceivable sense of urgency. The parable of the hidden treasure reminds us that once the person finds the treasure, he or she rushes to sell everything in order to buy the land where the treasure was found. Jesus does not say, “And after a few months, the person who finds the treasure puts all his belongings up for sale and then waits for the best price so he or she can purchase the land.” No. One can sense the incredible haste to complete the transaction and purchase the land to secure the treasure.
- ▶ Jesus’ sense of urgency brings with it a call—the call to repentance and reconciliation.
- ▶ Jesus insisted upon a complete reordering of one’s life, a *metanoia*, a change of direction: conversion, conversion, conversion!
- ▶ Members of the kingdom are called to discern the priorities in their lives. They are to ask themselves: “To what and for whom am I willing to expend my time, my energy, my love, and my passion?” If the answer to that question is not Christ and the kingdom of God, then serious conversion and repentance is needed.

⁴ Marthaler, Berard, *The Creed*, Mystic: Twenty Third Publications, 1987, 223-227.

Kingdom of God and miracles

- ▶ Miracles were signs that God's kingdom had arrived. We know the kingdom is at hand through the signs Jesus performed. Miracles strengthen faith.
- ▶ "The Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth" (LG #5).
- ▶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: the signs Jesus performed bear witness to him and invited faith (#548).
- ▶ "By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, illness, and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free men from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in the vocation as God's children and causes them all forms of human bondage" (CCC #549).
- ▶ Establishment of the kingdom is intimately connected to Jesus' healing, liberating mission to free the world from sin.
- ▶ *Miracle* is a term we use for the visible signs of God's presence, power, and love for his people that was observed in both the Old and New Testament (and still today).
- ▶ We know the kingdom is at hand through the signs Jesus performed. Miracles strengthen faith. "The Miracles of Jesus also confirm that the Kingdom has already arrived on earth" (Lumen Gentium #5).
- ▶ We are not, however, to view them in a magical, manipulative way. A miracle is an astonishing event that appears to have gone beyond or suspended the usual natural order. Nature cannot suspend itself. Thus, for nature to be suspended, God must intervene.
- ▶ Miracles are happenings that are accomplished by divine agency outside the commonly observed order of things (Thomas Aquinas).
- ▶ Miracles are more than an extraordinary event, however. They provide depth of meaning; they are signs that invite the personal response of conversion and faith.
- ▶ Not everyone who watched Jesus perform miracles had the eyes to "see" what they meant. Those who constantly asked for proof of who he was by some extraordinary sign or miracle were consistently refused.
- ▶ Another biblical understanding of miracle is: "marvelous, wonderful, and awesome deeds that are seen as signs of God's mercy and that reveals his infinite power and majesty...an act of power through which God gives a sign to human beings who are always astonished by it even though they recognize it quite in keeping with God's nature" (John Pilch, 620, 630: NJBC).
- ▶ Thus, it is important to remember that living in the kingdom invites us to not only reflect on the miracles of Jesus, but also on the miracles that occur in our own lives if we would have the eyes to see them.

The kingdom of God and the Church

- ▶ Jesus empowers the apostles to carry on his work establishing the kingdom. That authority continues through the pope, bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and through the work of God's people—through the Church.
- ▶ Everyone is part of the Kingdom of God—from the pope down to every member. As has been stated, we live in God's kingdom now with hope in the kingdom yet to come.
- ▶ Through the story of the Transfiguration in which Jesus was transfigured in glorious light in front of his disciples, we are given a glimpse of the God's heavenly kingdom.
- ▶ We will one-day share in Jesus' transfigured glory when we join him in the eternal city. We must not lose sight of that hope. Yet we live in the present. Our reality is that the kingdom of God is *now*.
- ▶ Jesus envisions a kingdom of peace where the lame walk, the blind see; where people lay down their lives for one another and the poor and oppressed are cared for.
- ▶ When one looks at today's society, it is often difficult to imagine such a kingdom. However, the kingdom of God is at hand when Christians gather in truth, hope, and love; when they live a gospel life, repent, change their lives, and spread the good news.⁵
- ▶ We help to establish the kingdom of God when we live according to God's holy Word.
- ▶ We are given access to the gospel when we are faithful to frequent reading of the biblical texts, when we hear those texts proclaimed in the Church's liturgy and when we tell others how the WORD of God has changed our lives and how it has challenged us to be better disciples.
- ▶ The kingdom of God is proclaimed at every liturgy when the gospel is proclaimed, and the Eucharist and the sacraments are celebrated. Every liturgy is a proclamation of the reign of God. Every liturgy gives us a taste of the kingdom to come.
- ▶ Every liturgy strengthens us to go out and establish the Kingdom of God in the world where God has put us. We promote the reign of God when we go out and tell others about it and when we try to live it as best we can.⁶

⁵ *Constitution on the Church*, Lumen Gentium, #5. United States Catholic Conference, Washington D.C., Nov. 21, 1964.
Marthaler, Berard. *The Creed*, Twenty Third Publications, Mystic CT, 1987. (223-227).

⁶ The following biblical citations are but a few that addresses the reign of God. Mt. 5:3, 11:25, 16: 21-23, 8; 11 10:5-7, 28; 25: 31-46. Lk. 4: 18, 7:22, 15:7, 7: 11-32. Heb. 4: 15; Mk. 1: 14-15; Jn. 12:32, 4:33-34. Acts 2:22, Lk 7:18-23.